



Phillip Jay Perry
Idaho Mental Health Court Participant
Criminal Justice Responses to Offenders with Mental Illness
Hearing Date: Tuesday, March 27, 2007
Written Statement
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I've had "urges" to hurt people since I was in high school. It wasn't until I dropped out of college and tried to jump off a grain elevator to kill myself did I begin to realize that I had a problem. My parents who have always been very supportive of me and my illness coaxed me into going and "talking" to someone about my problems after that first incident.

That was the first of many times to come that I was to be institutionalized in a mental health facility. It was there that I found out that everyone doesn't hear voices to tell them to do things like I do. I was diagnosed with a mental illness and that diagnosis was labeled Schizoaffective Disorder which essentially means that when not properly medicated I am delusional with a mood disorder. That disorder being clinical depression.

This was also the first of four times that I've been court committed to the state psychiatric hospital. There, they put me on a lot of medications with side-effects that I wasn't too fond of. So when I got out of the hospital, I stopped taking my medications because I found that marijuana helped ease my "voices" just as good as the medications did without the side effects that no one would want to have to live with for the rest of their lives.

There was, however, one bad aspect of the marijuana use. It was illegal. Which means I could get in trouble with the law for using it. And that is exactly what I did. I've counted it up and including the incarcerations in correctional facilities, I've been institutionalized 26 times in my adult life. Since the stays in the correctional facilities were always a result of my drug use which in turn was a factor in trying to help self-medicate my "voices," all these institutionalizations were a direct result of my illness.

Every time I've been put in one of the places they have put me in a drug and alcohol program because I have a drug and alcohol problem. Even in jail they had the AA program, but it seemed no matter how hard I tried, every time I got out I would revert back to my old habits and relapse and end up using again no matter how much sober time I had under my belt.

Fortunately for me though, I was introduced to the Mental Health Court Program the last time I was in jail. This program has changed my life for the best. I feel I can live a sober and relatively mentally stable life because of the tools and skills that the program has taught me. I do feel the program is a great program in itself. I can't speak for any of the other mental health court programs, but they wouldn't be as good as ours is if it weren't for the people like Judge Brent Moss, Eric Olson, and Randy Rodriguez. What I'm trying to say is that it wouldn't be as successful if it weren't for the people who run it like the ones I mentioned, who are caring, compassionate people.